
*The Business of Becoming a Professional Sociologist: Unpacking the Informal Training of Graduate School**

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While one can be labeled a sociologist in name by fulfilling formal institutional requirements, that is only part of the necessary work involved in graduate training. What is also required is mastering the informal professional culture associated with academic sociology. In this paper, we offer practical advice about informal norms in graduate school—norms we know now that we wish we'd known then. Our reflections upon our own experiences in graduate school are guided by our common research and teaching interests in informal organizational culture. What is the potential salience of informal norms, such as particularistic relations with faculty and graduate students, ceremonial versus actual practices regarding research and teaching, and emotional labor around one's work, for better understanding the professional socialization of graduate study in sociology? Our emphasis here is to offer advice on how to navigate the graduate school realities these norms present. We also believe that sociologists should turn a more focused eye on the profession, one in which the presence of such norms is readily acknowledged and more formally considered for the benefit of teaching graduate students.

With good reason, many aspiring sociologists want to know what it takes to navigate through graduate school and launch successful careers. After all, many material and emotional sacrifices are involved in pursuing doctoral work, and the future rewards for doing so are uncertain. For these reasons and others, graduate sociology programs typically have in place a formalized structure and set of rules to organize and define the process of professional training in sociology. These rules pertain to the number of years of coursework, the need to pick an official advisor, the requirements for acceptance into Ph.D. candidacy, and the criteria for successfully writing and defending a dissertation.

While we were graduate students in sociology at a university in the Midwest during the 1990s, we found that satisfying these requirements was only the tip of the iceberg. While one becomes a "sociologist" in name by fulfilling formal institutional requirements, to do so is only part of the necessary work involved in graduate training. What is also required is mastering the informal professional culture

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associated with academic sociology. The distinction drawn here between the formal and informal is an important one, for it plays out in the array of publishing outlets one has available, the kinds of jobs that are attainable, the mobility prospects of those different jobs, and personal satisfaction with the work.

This paper offers an articulation of the informal culture of graduate school in sociology as we experienced it. This particular culture places heavy emphasis on students landing jobs at research-oriented institutions, such as private or public universities and selective liberal arts colleges, as opposed to other professional goals that may drive one's interest in graduate school, such as obtaining academic jobs that are primarily teaching-focused or that allow graduates to be primarily activists for social change, and jobs outside the academy altogether. While faculty work may integrate some of these features, each of these goals also can represent a distinct job market for sociology Ph.D.s.

Our analysis does not represent officially the sociology department where we did our graduate work, nor do we intend to present any of the informal norms we examine as idiosyncratic to that department. However, even although we cannot say with empirical certainty how much of what we experienced exists across Ph.D. programs, the basic tenets of neo-institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) suggest a fair degree of homogeneity among the informal cultures of these programs. In reporting only about our own particular experiences, however, we acknowledge that graduate students are a qualitatively complex set of individuals, with different demographic and economic circumstances. The quality of their encounters with the norms that we describe here may well vary from our own.

The informal graduate school culture in our department was one in which students learned to treat their schooling as akin to starting their own business. We became attuned to the importance of being entrepreneurial in pursuing our research interests and in building networks with others of like interests who similarly understood the informal workings of the profession. As we embraced this informal professionalization, we were surprised at the extent to which some took the significance of these tasks for granted. It was as if there were an unspoken understanding among faculty that graduate students either intuitively would know how to master the informal norms necessary for becoming successful in the business, or they would gain this knowledge through their private working relations with individual faculty members.

Our surprise stemmed from a certain recognition that accompanied our respective entrepreneurial pursuits. For example, joining networks first requires knowing that they exist and then knowing how to enter them. Obtaining grants necessitates a similar reconnaissance. Publishing requires overcoming defensiveness, and researching the orientation and selectivity of different markets for scholarly works. In other words, completing these tasks does not unfold by the magic of having accomplished enough in the past to be accepted by graduate schools. Making one's way towards these goals doesn't just happen—it requires concerted effort and acquiring knowledge of informal professional norms.

Our reflections here on our experiences in graduate school are guided by our common research and teaching interests in informal organizational culture, an area of sociology that analyzes the contextual origins of the commonsense hindsight, "If only I had known then what I know now." The sociological equivalent is research on workplaces to identify the informal norms that people within organiza-

tions must master to get ahead. Several studies within this tradition demonstrate such an approach to analyzing upward mobility in occupations and professions. For example, Jackall (1988) studied how managers must cultivate a particular image as a “team player” to get ahead within large corporations. Sheppard (1989) showed that for women managers, part of their self-presentation involves managing their sexuality. Haas and Shaffir (1977) looked at how medical students learn to perform mastery over a wide field of detailed anatomical knowledge. And Bosk (1979) documented that medical students must also learn the meanings of the different kinds of errors they can commit in the presence of doctors of higher rank. The common characteristic of these examples is that they reinforce the importance of identifying and conforming to informal norms in order to realize one’s professional aspirations.

Given all the sociological research on informal norms in other professions, it is surprising that so few sociologists have turned their gaze to examining these same norms within graduate study in sociology. Our reflections here present insights about informal professional socialization that are rarely articulated formally, and that current and future graduate students would therefore benefit from knowing. To its credit, the department where we experienced these norms does formally attempt to institutionalize some of the items we address in this paper by requiring that first-year graduate students attend an “introduction to the discipline” seminar. Although we found this seminar to be an invaluable orientation to the research interests of departmental faculty, the seminar (at least at that time) did not generally address the various professional norms that we outline.

The rest of this paper offers advice we would give to sociology graduate students based on identifying the informal norms that typified our graduate school experiences. We make no claim here of identifying previously unfamiliar norms; indeed, we will feel some success from our efforts if we can frame some of the norms that “everybody knows” in a way that is useful to current and prospective graduate students. Nor are our reflections meant to constitute a foolproof “how to succeed in graduate school” protocol (although we hope they help), or an exhaustive listing of all possible informal norms and advice. Rather, our effort here is a modest attempt to give further shape to a culture of which mastery is critical for professional advancement, yet which is not typically discussed as part of formal graduate training for a career at a university or selective liberal arts college. We consider the initial exploration here as laying the groundwork for future research, the general outlines of which we discuss in the conclusion.

Sociology as Business

The overarching piece of informal knowledge we acquired in graduate school is that sociology is a business with a hierarchy that one must successfully navigate in order to do well professionally. Although many people are motivated to enter a graduate program, either by a love of academic discourse or by an activist social-justice mission cultivated while in college, graduate sociology students must learn not to mistake what they are experiencing as an extension of college. Although the basis for their intellectual and emotional excitement may be the same, the stakes in graduate school are quite different. Each of us learned early in graduate school that success in this business hinges on treating it as such. Nobody succeeds merely by

engaging in long, heated discussions about Weber or by seeing their research primarily as a vehicle for social change. While it is important for students to retain the fascination that influenced the decision to go to graduate school, they also need to become strategic in figuring out how they are going to become contributors to, not just consumers of, sociological knowledge.

Thus, knowing the business means much more than feeling comfortable discussing a given theorist or vigorously trying to change the world. It means generally familiarizing oneself with the outlets that exist for disseminating research—conferences, books, journals, and edited volumes. It also means gaining a more specific understanding of the different scholarly conferences that exist, how colleagues network, the prestige hierarchy in journals, the tradeoffs of going up and down the ladder in where to submit work, how people go through the manuscript submission process, and how colleagues and mentors can help circumvent and/or navigate the peer review process. Although it is not critical that students worry about publishing during their first year of graduate school, it is crucial that they learn to start paying attention to how the business works.

Students may be inclined early on just to take comfort in working to satisfy the formal demands of their coursework. However, clinging to such a mindset after the first year or two poses a trap. A core truism that graduate students rarely hear stated explicitly during the years that they are taking classes is that they are not in graduate school primarily to take classes, but to learn a set of professional practices that are seldom formally part of the curriculum. These professional practices center on how to produce publishable scholarship so that you can find employment afterwards as a sociologist. Few search committees at universities or selective liberal arts colleges will ever ask to see a graduate school transcript as part of a job application. Coursework is meant instead as a building block for developing scholarly interests and knowledge; unlike in college, grades no longer provide the most telling indicators of one's achievements.

Understanding the Market for Research and Teaching

Graduate students also may be misled about what drives the discipline. Since most people initially become turned on to sociology in the classroom rather than through their involvement in research, most may think that learning to be good teachers will be a prominent part of their graduate training. Finding out that the field is primarily motivated by the generation of new knowledge through published research can prove to be a rude awakening. It is typically the case across graduate programs that the proportion of attention given to teaching is substantially less than that given to research. Indeed, doing research is a means to the end of teaching. Research enables graduates to find employment as teachers, and publication is the coin of the professional realm. In today's job market at research universities and selective liberal arts colleges, teaching accolades minus research publications plus three dollars is worth a cup of Starbucks coffee.

Andrew Abbott (1981) has argued that professionals who have more contact with the publics they serve have a lower status than do practitioners who have limited public contact and instead submerge themselves in specialized research. Whether or not you like the implications of this proposition, it accurately characterizes the prestige system within the sociology profession. The distribution of pres-

tige among sociologists usually is correlated positively with seeking to do less teaching and more research; indeed, eminent sociologists are recruited to new jobs in part because they are promised limited teaching obligations and ample time to pursue research.

The truth of this point does not mean that people lack a commitment to teaching or that many sociologists never wish to enjoy and excel at both teaching and research. All institutions pay homage to the importance of teaching, and many actually mean it. However, understanding the role that teaching plays in the academy and graduate training is crucial. There are people who go to graduate school because they want to be great teachers, only to become disillusioned later. Since finishing a dissertation, not being a teaching whiz, is the currency for obtaining a Ph.D., these people risk delaying the completion of their doctoral training. Of those preoccupied with teaching who do ultimately finish their dissertations, many have trouble finding jobs because they have spent too much time on teaching or other activities and too little on publishing.

To be sure, opportunities still exist for graduate students to become good teachers and to land faculty jobs that focus primarily on undergraduate teaching. Yet a highly ranked sociology department geared toward producing successful academic researchers is not the kind of place where graduate students are likely to acquire informal knowledge about how to tap these opportunities. One such piece of crucial knowledge is that regional networks seem to matter in landing teaching-oriented jobs in a manner that is not comparably true for research jobs.

While more systematic study of these influences is certainly needed, an analysis of the academic market in Massachusetts provides at least a preliminary illustration of this point. We identified 10 teaching-oriented schools whose sociology department home pages list faculty educational backgrounds (many do not), and compared these data with data about faculty at three research-oriented institutions. Table 1 indicates that 40 of the 54 sociologists at the teaching schools (74 percent) received their Ph.D.s at a university either in Massachusetts or elsewhere in the Northeast (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, or Maine). In contrast, only 26 of the 55 sociologists at the three research schools (47 percent) earned their Ph.D.s at a university in the Northeast.

Thus, while indeed it is possible to pursue a career focused primarily on under-

Table 1

Teaching-Oriented versus Research-Oriented Faculty Employment in Massachusetts

Type of Institution	Sociologists who earned their Ph.D. at a university in the Northeast	Sociologists who earned their Ph.D. at a university outside the Northeast
Teaching-oriented (N=10)	40 (74%)	14 (26%)
Research-oriented (N=3)	26 (47%)	29 (53%)

graduate teaching, successfully doing so may well hinge on knowing how to forge regional social networks, and consequently attending regional conferences like the Eastern Sociological Society's annual meetings. Knowing the contours of the teaching-oriented market is a vital piece of information that students are unlikely to learn through their formal graduate training. It is crucial informal knowledge for those graduate students who aspire first and foremost to teaching-oriented jobs, as well as for sociology graduate students as a whole, given that the market for teaching jobs recently has become comparatively more plentiful than the market for research jobs (Stinchcombe 2000).

There are other job markets in sociology, in addition to the primary research and teaching-oriented positions. Some allow graduates to become primarily activists for social change; jobs outside the academy altogether exist in government, business, and private research organizations. The pathways to these job markets are not well-charted for graduate students, who, if interested, must do their own legwork to uncover them.

There are also sub-markets of both the mainstream research and teaching-oriented markets—for example, the rarified elite markets for positions at top research institutions. This silent, elite job market consists of the same three or four candidates, making the rounds of interviews in any given year at such top-tier institutions as Arizona, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Michigan, Northwestern, NYU, UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Wisconsin. The workings of that market are not clearly known to us, but we do know that each year, a few select graduate students become hot commodities and experience networks and opportunities far beyond those that typify the mainstream research-oriented market. Publications in the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review* and/or a book already accepted for publication by the University of Chicago or University of California presses seem prerequisites here. But these accomplishments are not always necessary conditions. Having tremendous word-of-mouth from an influential mentor and an imminent or completed Ph.D. from a top institution are necessary. Because more people have these qualifications than are anointed into this elite market, the way this elite pool develops is complex and variable.

A diversity market sometimes but not always overlaps with the silent elite market, in which minority candidates are specifically sought for positions. The experiences of these candidates and their subsequent positive and negative encounters with job market opportunities warrant inquiry. Further work is needed to clarify the nature and workings of the different existing job markets and their specialized niches.

Accessing Funding

Paying for graduate school requires money, as does conducting research. So attaining grants and fellowships is also an important prestige marker. Many graduate students arrive at their institutions knowing they have a minimum number of years with financial support. For graduate students who do not obtain financial support from the outset, acquiring funding is always a critical need. But for most, there is no great imperative to get money early, although one should be aware of its importance. Funding will become more crucial after the early years. However, even with funding, graduate study drains one's finances. Without funding, sustained

graduate study becomes increasingly difficult, even with a generous private financial reserve.

The informal culture is a part of obtaining funding. First is knowing where funding exists. For “inside” sources of money, locals at the institution, such as faculty at research centers or graduate chairs, decide who will be awarded what funds (and, on occasion, who will not be). For “outside” sources of money, governmental or external funding agencies hold open competitions for awards. In addition, specialized outside forums for money exist, and so it is important professional knowledge to learn which funding agencies are associated with which subfields. For example, anyone interested in education should know about the Spencer Foundation; those interested in criminology should know about the National Institute of Justice.

Obtaining funding again requires individual entrepreneurship. Outside of teaching fellowships, how to acquire funding is often informal knowledge. How does one complete a successful application? How does one gain a leg up accessing inside money? How can people parlay success getting grants to achieve a domino effect that will lead to attaining future resources? What is the best way to package a project to obtain money?

Part of the entrepreneurship required is in gaining useful advice from faculty members. All students are not going to get the same level of faculty leadership here. Some faculty are uninterested in outside money and do not get it. Other faculty members have giant grants and run shops, with allocation to their monies reserved to shop participants. Still others have expertise in applications and are willing to help. Faculty members can assist with locating sources of funding, outside letters of support, and with the techniques of making applications. One of the most helpful acts a faculty member can do, for example, is to share a past successful application so that a student can model his or her own work on a proven modus operandi. It is also possible for students to reach clear partnerships with some faculty, to agree to work jointly on a newly funded project. In these cases, the faculty member often does the heavy lifting required to get the money, and then the student does a lot of the heavy lifting to get the data.

An important part of the informal professional culture is learning how to package one’s work to suit the market of potential funders. As noted previously, a critical lesson in informal socialization in graduate training is to have a ready framing of one’s work available for professional audiences. To paraphrase a faculty member, a graduate student should have a long “job talk” version of his or her work and an “elevator” version, one that he or she can present to people in thirty seconds to a minute in casual conversation. Funding is another occasion in which such packaging is important—research has to be framed to conform to the interests of funders, just as job candidates tailor their research to a position’s advertised needs. Your research, for example, can be made to stretch the gamut from fitting an “organizations” niche to a “deviance” niche to a “criminology” niche and back again. In seeking funding, many package their work to fit multiple funding initiatives. As another person once put it in describing the job market, “My areas are whatever the posted requirements are.” Such flexibility (within ethically tolerable limits) also applies to seeking funding.

An overall point in keeping with the business entrepreneur analogy is that intellectual labor is a commodity. One has to heighten the exchange value of this commodity whenever possible. Informal socialization in graduate school is about how

to gain tangible accomplishments, and in turn how to develop one's accomplishments as a valuable commodity. As one progresses forward, fellowships and grants may come to supply their own forward momentum, with a past history of success helping to shape the odds in one's favor for obtaining continued future success. One can pad one's resume with inside money funding. If inside money has a prestigious external origin but local decision-makers, then competition is less than if obtained through open competition. However the prestige is still dramatic and outsiders need not know the difference.

Learning the Informal Entrepreneurial Curriculum of Graduate School

Given that so much of the knowledge needed to navigate the professional hierarchy in sociology is informal, students need to be active in seeking out information that may prove critical down the road. We learned the importance of being entrepreneurial in our respective endeavors, whether that meant embarking on multiple research projects, developing collaborations with faculty members and fellow graduate students, or presenting works in progress to different audiences. We learned the significant extent to which graduate school is a place where students must work to create their own opportunities—not necessarily from scratch, but by tapping resources that exist on campus or more broadly within the discipline.

The remainder of this section discusses a general process through which we each learned the informal curriculum of professional socialization during our years in graduate school. This process entailed defining students' interests, building social networks, and identifying with positive role requirements.

Defining Your Interests

Our department has an annual ritual that takes place the first week of the fall term. All faculty, staff, and graduate students gather for two hours to become acquainted and reacquainted with one another. It is a way to kick off the new school year. At this gathering, each graduate student is asked to say very briefly what her/his research interests are. Only after repeatedly experiencing this event over a number of years could we articulate what it was about this event that was so unnerving to each of us. It wasn't merely the fact that we had to state our research interests in front of our entire faculty and peers; it was also that everyone else appeared to have a neatly packaged set of interests that they seemed to have figured out effortlessly. Indeed, it strikes us in retrospect how significant this departmental gathering is as a formal proclamation to graduate students of the importance of developing and stating a concise set of research interests and then vigorously pursuing them. This message is especially powerful for first-year students, for whom the departmental gathering is their first significant exposure to the culture of the department.

What is interesting about the informal knowledge students need to professionalize is not that it contradicts the formal, but rather how it *adds* to the formal. Each of us learned the importance over time of projecting a clear research agenda to a scholarly audience. Meandering in making one's points wins as few accolades in presentations as it does in writing. However, we also learned how much these performances of stated conciseness cloak the long and arduous journeys involved in

figuring out one's intellectual place and path within the field. We noticed not that sociologists are masters at impression management (though of course like everyone else they try to be), but that beneath these impressions lies important informal knowledge about how graduate students should craft their intellectual identities. In retrospect, we realize that the anxiety we each felt at having to publicly package ourselves at the yearly departmental gatherings was constructive in pushing us to develop our own scholarly niches.

How, then, does one go about forging that identity? First, each of us learned the importance of being open-minded and patient as we figured out our respective interests. We experienced the virtues of exploring other departments within the university, recognizing that social science does not begin or end with sociology. For example, each of us team-taught a field research seminar on work and organizations with anthropology graduate students for the university's interdisciplinary undergraduate business concentration.

Sometimes, however, intellectual open-mindedness is difficult to come by and to cultivate, since academic departments can be venues of immodesty where people are only too happy to set up shop as the ultimate and most legitimate source for all knowledge. Anthropologists, historians, psychologists, political scientists, and sociologists all can foster departmental manifestations that see themselves as doing better, more appropriate work than their social science competitors. Academics may be happy to have turf wars; some colleges and universities have a balkanization among and within their academic departments that is comprised of petty and arrogant intellectual wars, embarrassing in their vociferousness and harmful in their pedagogical and research consequences.

We learned the importance of respecting what other social science practitioners and departments in general can teach you about your area of study. You might find research and funding opportunities there, as well as a capacity to integrate more than you thought you might into your own approach to an issue. On a further practical level, you can also find kindred spirits, sources of funding and research opportunities, and potential collaborators on pedagogical and scholarly projects. Both of us have ended up publishing work with colleagues who were graduate students in other departments. People who do not at least explore the worlds outside their own department's borders diminish their opportunities to reap these rewards.

As a general point, criticism of ideas must walk a fine line between adding to the development of scientific discourse and thinking mistakenly that disparaging ideas as a blood sport is the same thing. Graduate students can work so hard at showing themselves to be intellectual rebels that they ironically never become free thinkers—they just enslave themselves to their convention of choice, and choose one brand of intellectual conformity for another. Close-mindedness can curry favor with similarly disposed professors and graduate students, but a larger and more diverse world of practitioners can make intellectual intolerance a Pyrrhic victory. Open intellectual self-righteousness will cause you problems now and later, unless you are either a genius or protected politically and institutionally.

Further, a message that we gleaned over time was that being reflective and open to ideas pays many dividends. We learned that it is okay to change your mind about what interests you, as long as you remain focused within a general area within the discipline and continue to pursue research in that area. We learned what

a virtue it can be for early graduate students to be uncertain of their interests, so long as they were entrepreneurial in working to define those interests. While our department's annual fall gathering could easily produce in students unsettling feelings of "lacking direction," we learned the benefits of maintaining a degree of flexibility about our respective interests. Our experiences suggest that the goal for graduate students, although never formally stated as such, is that students ought to be developing research interests that are well defined, yet leave room for change. Also, you should work to find a happy medium between having a breadth of interests and depth in one or two of your interests.

What does this suggestion mean practically? That the subject of your dissertation may change. That your advisors may change. That someone who writes a master's thesis on women in martial arts may end up writing a dissertation on risk management. That someone interested in Marxism in Cuba may end up writing a dissertation on John Dewey's effects on American education. Allow yourself the opportunity to develop different ideas. Graduate school can take a long time, but one virtue of its length is allowing different intellectual interests to percolate and to evolve into concrete forms.

Building Social Networks

There are several important types of social networks that you need to develop while in graduate school. Probably the two most important network relations are with departmental faculty and fellow graduate students.

Faculty. Graduate school is in large part about the relations you forge with graduate faculty (Keith and Moore 1995). Graduate education is accomplished through particularistic relations with professors that are funneled through an institutional structure. You receive a Ph.D. because of your faculty advisors, who help develop the work in the dissertation, sign off on the paperwork, and write recommendations that allow you to commence a career in the sociological profession. In other words, although you earn a degree from a particular name institution, your professional pedigree is more meaningfully the result of the reputation and perceived investment of expertise and training into you by your faculty mentors. You must pursue faculty who will mentor you, who can help advance your research, and who have the capacity to help you win employment. Faculty advisors (other than your chair) need not have done empirical research within the same general area as your dissertation in order to be helpful in your professional development. The quality of your work matters; so does the identity and status of the faculty member who endorses by letter and reputation that quality. If professor superstar states that job candidate X's star will become ascendant, that testimony is accorded important predictive power.

Each of us came to see, over the course of our years in graduate school, the value of getting to know many different faculty members. This internal network is crucial. Some graduate students make the mistake of never talking to professors, either because they are intimidated and nervous about saying something stupid, or because they only care about getting to know one or two faculty members. Other graduate students make the mistake of arrogance in their encounters with faculty members. In general, there is a difference between challenging an intellectual opinion

and being arrogant and dismissive, appearing to know more than you do. Try to demonstrate the kind of working personality that you would want in peers.

We believe that several informal norms are relevant to establishing relations with faculty during graduate school, some of them less than obvious. For example, while some graduate students think of their advisors as good recommendation-writers for jobs following Ph.D. completion, it is also important to remember that your faculty advisors represent you within the internal world of the graduate program. They are your representatives in the local and external professional culture. In this respect, it is important for your happiness and professional stability that you think of developing safe-harbor relationships with faculty members. Faculty should be people with whom you can talk about how you are doing and about your work. Having a good working relationship also helps during any dark times; you may avoid feeling alienated or dispirited and enjoy graduate school more. You also give your diplomatic corps the knowledge and motivation to do well by you. Busy people don't mind a little neediness as long as you do not go to the well too often or inappropriately.

Some faculty may not care about you and your research interests or your problems. But graduate school is a school of hard knocks, and you may well experience some closed doors. To quote one of our professors, "Don't bang your knuckles bloody on a locked door." Whether legitimately or illegitimately, some faculty members may spurn you. Move on in a professional manner to the next best candidate.

Another issue involves faculty members publishing with graduate students. These collaborations give students a leg up in the competition for jobs, as well as a higher ranking within the departmental pecking order. We cannot overestimate the importance of cultivating opportunities to publish with faculty members. This can make your career, particularly if such opportunities allow you to circumvent peer review, such as when a professor writes a chapter with you for an edited volume or special issue of a journal.

Publishing with faculty can also bring out the worst in other graduate students and faculty, some of whom may assume that you only published because a faculty member made it possible. Credit for publication here can have fluctuating value. In some cases, coauthorship means negligible credit for the publication, both externally and internally. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, a publication is a publication. In addition to reveling in having published, you will have learned from the experience.

It is always crucially important to remember that it is not the faculty's job to get you publications. It is their job to help develop sociologists who can generate publishable works. It is your job to get published—this point is the most important of all lessons to learn while in graduate school. You may get to collaborate on publications with faculty members, but you cannot hang your hat exclusively on that possibility or seek it out as a panacea that will serve as an alternative to publishing on your own. Remember that you will have to develop projects envisioning the capacity to publish them, and you have to be able to prove convincingly that you can do so in order to secure postgraduate employment.

As part of collaboration possibilities, you should be open to research assistant opportunities but be aware that some opportunities and professors are labor/thought vampires. You are operating in a work structure where there is a pronounced power

inequality between yourself and a faculty member interested in hiring you for a research assistant position. In our experience, most faculty members are straightforward, non-exploitative, and even overly generous about work arrangements, but you may hear horror stories about what it is like to work with a particular faculty member. Even if you are not completely happy or feel that choosing some work is involuntary, you are better off with your eyes open than shut. Some people spend extra years in graduate school because they get involved as research assistants in projects that do not bear them fruit. The principle that some arrangements can sound too good to be true also applies to the occasional pitch for graduate research assistants. Some faculty, for example, may state that future co-authorship is a possibility, or promise access to research findings and then change their minds *ex post facto*. In those situations, months or years of research work can end up having much less payoff than anticipated. You should not let visions of future stars cloud your mind—check out what has happened in the past with other graduate students.

Graduate Students. As a graduate student, you should cultivate and work at good relations with graduate students that you like, including people who are in cohorts after and before your own. You are going through the experience together, and you can help motivate and support each other. Also, you are in graduate school with smart people. Enjoy them. Use them for support groups, for motivating publications, for safely venting angry diatribes against people who infuriate you, and for just general life enjoyment. As an example, both of us were in several working groups of fellow graduate students, including one that forced deadlines on members to submit articles to journals, another that read dissertation proposals, and another that focused exclusively on qualitative work. These sorts of involvements mimic the types of professional networks that you will enter into later on when you will be acting as peer reviewers. Get some practice forming good productive relations with colleagues. You will learn a lot from other graduate students, and you will interact with them later professionally as well. At the risk of making too crass a point of it, how you interact with your graduate student peers is another form of professional socialization, one you might call “Colleague 101.” Working well with at least a few people who are likely to be your own professional peers is an early modeling of negotiating and enjoying the relationships you will have with other professionals over the course of your career.

Identifying With Positive Role Requirements

One of the most difficult informal aspects of graduate study is wrestling with self-doubt. On this score, it is crucial not to compare yourself into paralysis by endlessly evaluating your own accomplishments against those of the most successful graduate students. Graduate school, like many other places, can involve lots of looking over your shoulder to see how you are doing in comparison to everybody else, getting lost in those comparisons or in the ones that other people make.

Some people publish early (usually their master’s theses or equivalent) and may even have publications prior to entering the program. Others appear incredibly and insurmountably intelligent, with an intimidating level of knowledge. People publish and hit other successful marks at different times in their graduate school careers and beyond. You must submit work for publication to get a job—but if other people are publishing first, big deal. The only timetable for publication is one

that nets you publications. You may be ready to publish work earlier or later. What matters is that you do publish, not when. You have to tell yourself that you will get there when you are ready. Just do the things you have to do—research, working on writing, and so forth—and submit when ready. At the same time, monitor your own progress. There is a difference between not being ready and putting off, and being ready and putting off. The former is okay, but the latter is not. Check with your mentors and peers about which category suits the current progress of your work, and then take appropriate action.

Inflexible defensiveness is your enemy. Everybody has some sensitivity and trepidation about exposing their ideas to criticism. But that sensitivity cannot make you an intellectual hermit who never shows work to anybody—friends, faculty members, or reviewers. You are in the business of presenting ideas to other people, in classes, presentations, and publications. You cannot hoard every idea or insight you have until you think it is finally polished enough to be presented perfectly. Ideas that don't see the light of day unless by an advisor's force may succeed in staving off criticism; unfortunately for you, that criticism may contain the inevitable adjustments that a paper requires in order to become publishable. Defensiveness isn't a virtue in this business, but a bane.

In general, you have to be open to criticism. People who criticize your work are doing their job, what they are asked to do. They can be wrong, of course, and you can feel a criticism is unwarranted. What matters is that you listen to what people have to say about how your work looks to them. What do other people make out of what you are arguing? Are you communicating effectively? Are you actually wrong? You have to listen to how to develop work and ideas from people who know what standards to approximate. Ask tough people to read your work. They might like it! You can lose valuable advice if you avoid criticism. Think about who you will ask to read your work. Consider why they would be good readers and then follow through and distribute the work. You want to anticipate to whatever degree you can a process where you get used to soliciting and responding to feedback on your work. The business works that way, and this give-and-take is both one of the best parts of the discipline with friends and a necessity with reviewers. If the people you want to read your work do not do so, then find useful alternative readers.

While the academic world of graduate school can be an oasis of ideas and intellectual excitement, that oasis also can be a dark place. Graduate school can seem like a treadmill in which no matter how fast you run, you will not get where you are desperate to go. Graduate school cannot consume your life. Life goes on even here—you are an adult even while you are an apprentice. People get married, have kids, and take on outside projects and interests. Do not lose sight of your own life—these are the young years for many of us. Bitter Graduate Student Syndrome is to be avoided if possible. There is an outside world beyond your studies. But don't spend too much of your time away, either. When graduate school voluntarily becomes purely a distant second fiddle to outside world pursuits, you can expect to add more years to your Ph.D. timetable, potentially unhappy ones.

The Institutional Reluctance to See Sociology as a Business

Our discussion of informal norms references the characteristics of professional culture that “everyone knows” but that rarely are articulated. People respond in

various ways to these characteristics. Social behaviors are best not analyzed solely as the crude result of people acting in unthinking conformity to norms. In fact, some of what happens in graduate school reflects anything but an intended conformity to norms! However, some faculty members are reluctant to discuss the metaphorical equivalence, or analogy, of sociology departments as containing myriad small businesses, and of individual practitioners as entrepreneurs within those businesses. We each can point to several individual faculty members who did discuss these features with us as part of their mentoring work.

A true feature of graduate education is that some graduate students and faculty simply outshine others dramatically, publishing more lauded work in top journals, getting their books accepted by the best publishers, gaining more fervent followings among graduate students, and achieving star status among professional peers and the public. The business analogy openly acknowledges the comparison of who is better in volume and product as a salient and recognized fact. Learning how to talk about “stars” is a part of attending graduate school, not simply analyzing and touting their virtues with an appropriate awe, but discussing why some make better intellectual sales, and why others seem unlikely to finish successfully. The business analogy thus abets insecurity and also highlights potentially discrediting aspects of programs, such as people dropping out or not getting jobs (some business startups don’t work out). Graduate school is also a place in which some faculty members do not want to be “bad guys” and tell people that they are not doing as well as they need to be—there is always “time.” The business metaphor has winners and losers, and a competitive overtone that does not fit in well with the rhetoric of egalitarianism and intellectual nurture that departments tout.

Additionally, some faculty may believe that informal socialization into the profession is to be earned only by virtue of a graduate student’s high talent level. There are at least two tiers of distributing informal professional knowledge: one in which students go through the program oblivious to the subterranean world of tips, and another where some students, anointed by their perceived ability, motivation, and a professor’s discretion, advance forward armed with crucial insights and connections. Thus, failing to openly distribute professional socialization can be an invisible and unstated form of hierarchical gatekeeping, meritocratic-based inequality in the midst of the appearance of egalitarian training. To make this point is not to critique this promotional choice—it seems a likely consequence of recognizing that people have different abilities and production. Instead, the issue is how the consequences of individual differences and professorial discretion mediate the distribution of important information. Alternatively, one can also question how much accessing advantageous inside information, as in other workplaces, combines an assessment of ability and a function of favoritism. Noting functional aspects of stratification may not be trendy in sociology, but applying the idea of merit matching reward is applicable here.

The business analogy is not pretty in the way that identifiable social justice work emphatically is, as is valorizing the golden quest for knowledge. The business analogy of production can be seen as at odds with a view of sociology as a sort of holistic movement aimed at social justice, redistribution of economic resources, and curtailing of institutional racism and sexism. A divergence between the business and movement orientations can produce conflict at the individual level and battles over appropriate courses, teaching styles, personnel, and research. While

our graduate department is known as an unusually hospitable place, no budding sociologist was blind to these debates, nor to the subterranean commentaries that existed about such politics. Knowing your “isms” is an important part of graduate education; discussing the practical consequences of how people incorporate them into the immediate disciplinary setting, both socially and concretely, is also important.

What is practical is not always idiosyncratically desirable. Graduate students select areas of specialization, hoping to enter into particular markets (criminology, gender, stratification, and quantitative methodology). Along the way, students choose very specific research projects for their dissertations. Sometimes what people want to write will have a very narrow market value, but to state that a lack of commercial scholarly value may exist is taboo for several reasons. First, scholarly work in sociology valorizes the ability to pursue potentially esoteric topics. Among academics, that opportunity is a sacrosanct value even if in practice there is an eventual requirement to justify research projects. A graduate student may want to do a comparative historical study of pipe-fitters, or fieldwork on Wicca sexuality. To encourage these projects without asking students to show why doing that research is a good idea vis-à-vis some academic market is a dilemma immediately tied to the business analogy. Answering the “So what?” question about the relevance of an intellectual product is an important part of scholarly work. Just as businesses must produce objects that someone in a market will buy, sometimes that same need to be commercial can constrain or be at odds with the more aesthetic motivations and rewards of scholarship. Having to be commercial can clash with the iconoclastic intellectual spirit of academics.

Conclusion

Graduate training in sociology, like all work, is composed of some ratio of explicit tasks to master (learning theories, statistics, who the important figures are, and so forth) and informal professional norms through which people actually practice the sociological craft. Not to be forgotten in this mix is the simple drive, enthusiasm, and intellectual firepower that graduate students bring to their work. However, sociological research on workplaces has taught us that peoples’ skills and aspirations are mediated through informal structures that ultimately end up affecting their eventual outcomes at work.

In this paper, we have tried to identify practical advice that we know now and wish we had known then. However, we can do more to articulate the informal norms of graduate training. Because graduate school proceeds through particularistic relations with individual faculty, students need, in Jackall’s (1988) terms, a mentor or “rabbi” to help them progress. Intelligence doesn’t speak for itself; it needs adherents. Meritocracy, when achieved through particularistic institutions, is in the eye of the beholder. In athletic endeavors, merit can be more objectively identified, but that is not the case in graduate training or in most workplaces. Sociology is certainly not immune to this problem. All of us can point not only to the job squeeze, but also to cases where people progressed in careers with a minimum of publications but a maximum of an advisor’s reputational push, or inexplicably did not advance in the profession despite having published reams of good work. The importance of particularistic relations within graduate training means that people

must pay attention to impression management and to cultivating the kind of working personality that will enable them to succeed in that environment.

Further, classes do not matter a great deal in the eventual outcome of graduate students, at least in the sense of grades vetting out success. Classes expose students to ways of thinking about ideas and how to present them, but for the most part, class materials are simply distant memories by dissertation time. Similarly, it is a fact that teaching takes a back seat to research, despite the consistent cajoling of administrations to value teaching in all symbolic worlds except the ones that count: hiring and promotion. Thus, the importance of research in graduate school is paramount, and one must accept this reality in order to persevere. A classic lesson of organizational theory is that workers quickly learn which aspects of the party line are to be taken at face value and which are to be taken seriously. In graduate school, research must be taken most seriously.

Finally, all jobs have some component of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), some set of demands for self-presentation that workers must accede to in order to perform their work successfully. Graduate training in sociology is no exception to this requirement, including how one should enthusiastically present his/her intellectual identities publicly. The structure of academic work naturally can lead one into defensiveness. For the most part, we are out there alone generating and presenting the best research and original ideas that we can, and we cannot cloak ourselves under assumed identities in order to confront the evaluation of our labors. We are psychologically tied to our ideas, which are raw and vulnerable. We are socialized into a scientific tradition that often defines advancement through criticism of weaker ideas and promotion of more accurate, improved ones. To be found on the wrong side of weaker ideas is a rampant fear. Graduate students must learn to manage the psychological effects of a defensive professional practice, as well as the emotional labor involved in presentation of the role of budding new scholar.

We have touched on a few of the classic dimensions of informal norms, such as particularistic relations, ceremonial versus actual practices and emotional labor, and their potential salience for better understanding the professional socialization of graduate study in sociology. While our emphasis has been more to offer advice on how to navigate the realities that these norms present, we do believe that sociologists should turn a more focused eye on the profession, one in which the presence of these norms is acknowledged and more formally considered for the benefit of graduate students. As a pedagogical requirement, we should be honest about some of the informal realities of graduate school as part of helping to aid the success of future sociologists. We hope this paper is a start down that road. As a research requirement, we also believe that informal norms are a consistently powerful aspect of work experience on which shedding any and all light is important.

Important questions for future research include these: What do sociologists identify as the “correct lessons”? How did they learn them? When in the sequence of graduate study is a good time to learn those lessons? What are the “correct lessons” for each of the different markets that exist? Are some business lessons harder to absorb than others? Why? How are they taught differently, depending on where people pursued their graduate training?

Behind these questions are implicit pedagogical and research agendas. First, there is a need to be more direct in imparting these points to graduate students as at the very least, a reflective focus of their work, and at the most, to help their mo-

mentum in advancing forward into professional practice. Second, as a research agenda, we both believe in examining facets of informal organizational culture that shed light into the profession. Sociologists should not be immune to the techniques of appraisal they apply to others, nor should they be denied their benefits.

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